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Abstract

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In this paper, we argue that such a view neglects a second driver of declining turnout: anticipation of government inefficacy. Where economic austerity constrains governments, highly educated citizens with the necessary political knowledge and sophistication anticipate the inefficacy of the future government and they factor this knowledge in when deciding about electoral participation. Therefore, the positive effects of education on turnout decline with increasing international and domestic austerity constraints. We provide cross-sectional evidence for this argument on the basis of hierarchical regression models, based on ESS round 5 (2010) and SILC survey data, as well as different measures of government constraint in 22 European countries during the economic crisis.

1. Introduction

What are the effects of the economic crisis on electoral turnout? While an increasing literature studies the effects of the great recession on government reactions (Pontusson and Raess 2012, Armingeon 2012) or on the impact of economic voting on election results (Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2013), we know little about the crucial steps preceding government formation, let alone government policies, i.e. the question whether and why people in the ongoing economic crisis participate at all in the election of a new government. Given the concerns that many scholars have recently raised about the impact of increasing inequality and austerity on democratic legitimacy and responsiveness (Anderson and Beramendi 2012; Streeck and Mertens 2013; Schäfer 2013; Mair 2013; Offe 2013), this question seems of utmost importance and topicality.

The literature suggests an effect of economic hardship on electoral turnout (Martins and Veiga 2012), but remains ambivalent with respect to the direction of the effect. On the one hand, it could be that citizens more strongly feel the need and desire to express their grievances at the polls – the "*mobilization-effect*" of a strained economic context (Schlozman and Verba 1979). On the other hand, however, citizens may turn away from politics out of frustration, a lack of resources or shifting priorities – the *"withdrawal effect"* of economic hardship (Rosenstone 1982). The turnout levels at post-crisis elections so far, however, suggest that there is no linear and simple relationship between economic performance and aggregate levels of electoral participation. Some hard hit countries like Slovenia or Ireland show an increase in aggregate turnout, while others such as Spain and especially Greece have exhibited a sharp drop in turnout.[1] In the range of countries that have continued to grow moderately over this time period, there is no clear pattern recognizable, either. Germany and the Netherlands, for instance, have seen a significant decline in turnout levels after the crisis, while other countries such as Sweden exhibit higher participation rates.

The ambivalence of these results point to a blind spot of both the mobilization- and the withdrawal-theories. Both neglect that the negative economic effects of economic downturns do not affect all parts of the society equally. Moreover, the

[1] Sources: Döring and Manow (2012), Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Political Data Yearbook.

reaction of different social groups to economic hardship may vary according to their social, economic or cognitive resources. Thereby, countervailing effects may happen simultaneously and overcompensate each other in varying ways, suggesting the conclusion that there is no link at all between economic performance and turnout. There is a very high chance that such a conclusion would be simply wrong.

This is why we argue in this paper that we need to a) study the effects of the crisis on turnout at the *individual level* and b) distinguish theoretical mechanisms and empirical effects for *different social groups*. Existing resource- and incentive-based theories focus mostly on the behavior of citizens with low socio-economic resources (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Blais 2006). We argue that such a view neglects a second driver of changing turnout levels: the changing behavior of citizens with high levels of socio-economic and cognitive resources. These citizens used to be the champions of electoral participation. However, things may very well have changed. We argue that where economic austerity constrains governments, highly educated citizens with the necessary political knowledge and sophistication anticipate the inefficacy of the future government and may decide to abstain, because they do not believe that election results will matter. Therefore, the positive effects of education on turnout should decline with increasing international and domestic austerity constraints.

Our paper is structured as follows. We start by briefly reviewing the literature on economic performance, inequality and electoral participation, showing that the changing incentive structure for the more highly educated has been largely neglected so far. We then develop our own theoretical argument with reference to theories of economic voting, before testing it empirically by means of a hierarchical regression model. Finally, we offer two additional analyses that provide further insights on the differences in the educational effects dependent on austerity constraints.

2. Economic performance, resource distribution and electoral participation

The ways in which the economic-distributive context affects turnout at the individual and at the aggregate levels have been studied from two main, but largely symmetrical perspectives, focusing either on overall economic performance in terms of growth or unemployment (e.g. Rosenstone 1982, more recently Martins and Veiga 2012) or on the resulting distributive consequences, notably patterns of inequality (e.g. Goodin and Dryzek 1980, more recently Solt 2008 or Anderson and Beramendi 2011, 2012). In both strands of the literature, we find different theoretical arguments in both possible directions, i.e. predicting a mobilizing or a demobilizing effect of bad economic performance or rising inequality on turnout.

With regard to possibly mobilizing effects of economic hardship, it has been argued that economic strain may create incentives for people to be more active politically, because the stakes increase and because they blame the government and want to make their discontent count at the polls (Martin and Veiga 2012). Similarly, conflict theory (Solt 2008) suggests that increasing inequality exacerbates the divergences in political preferences between the economically disadvantaged and the more well-off classes in society. This polarization is supposed to fuel political conflict about the right distribution of resources and thereby stimulate more interest and participation in the political process, whereas a more equal distribution of resources in the society should foster consensus and quiescence in society, resulting in lower levels of political engagement (Brady 2004). Theories on inequality and participation do distinguish between different incentive structures for the rich and the poor, but they arrive at the same conclusion: heightened economic strain raises the stakes of both groups in politics and should stimulate participation among both of them.

Rosenstone's (1982) argument on "economic adversity and voter turnout", while also advancing an incentive-based argument, goes in exactly the opposite direction. He argued that in times of economic strain, the priorities of persons who suffer economic adversity shift towards more immediate concerns, at the expense of more abstract or "remote" concerns such as politics. The result is a demobilizing effect of economic downturns, by depressing participation among the

economically vulnerable parts of society. The argument that increased hardship depresses, rather than strengthens, participation is also shared in a wide range of studies on inequality and participation (Anderson and Beramendi 2011, Beramendi and Rueda 2011, Pontusson and Rueda 2010, Schäfer 2013). There are, however, two mechanisms that can be distinguished here. "Relative power theory" (Goodin and Dryzek 1980) postulates that increasing inequality concentrates power among the rich, which is why they more consistently prevail in political conflict, teaching the poorer citizens that their goals cannot be effectively pursued through the political process. This is the "incentive-model" of withdrawal. At the same time, the "resource-theory" of political participation holds that relatively poorer individuals tend to abstain from political participation, because they lack time, money, social and cognitive skills to engage in politics (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Gallego 2010). In other words, they abstain because they don't have the necessary resources to participate, not because they rationally decide to withdraw. Citizens with higher levels of resources, on the other hand, have the necessary resources, skills and psychological dispositions (interest and knowledge) to participate in politics anyway. Therefore, increasing inequality should depress participation among the disadvantaged, while the participation of the upper classes is assumed to be stable and strong.

As we could see from this short review of the literature, existing theories tend to explain variations in turnout mostly with regard to the (non-)participation of the more disadvantaged social strata (in terms of income, education or more general socio-economic resources), assuming that economically and cognitively more privileged citizens tend to participate strongly in any case. The positive link between social status and participation has been asserted mostly on the basis of cognitive arguments, i.e. with regard to education. The positive correlation between education and participation can be regarded as one of most solid evidence provided by the literature on political participation, be it that education is regarded as driver of political activity per se or rather as a proxy for a much larger concept of cognitive and social resources (Kam and Palmer 2008; Gallego 2010).

However, such a view overlooks a striking puzzle: tentative evidence suggests that during the recent economic crisis, electoral turnout in some countries has declined *even among the highly educated classes* (Gubler 2013). The assumption that high levels of resources guarantee high levels of participation might thus no longer hold for all electoral contests. Hence, there seems to be a hidden side to declining turnout that has so far been strongly neglected in theory and empirical research: what are the effects of the economic crisis on the better-off? It is obvious that a resource-model does not travel far in this respect, as these voters have all necessary social and cognitive skills to participate. Rather, we need to think about the changing incentives they are exposed to.

3. The electoral calculus under conditions of constrained government

The theorization of electoral calculus and incentive-based electoral behavior is probably most fully developed in the theory of economic voting, which holds that voters punish or reward the government in line with the course of the economy (Key 1966, Duch and Stevenson 2008, Fossati 2012). The empirical evidence for the economic vote overall is somewhat inconclusive and effects are substantively small generally (Kayser and Peress 2013, Kayser and Wlezien 2010, Fraile and Lewis-Beck 2013). However, the great merit in this literature is the recognition and theorization that incentive-based electoral behavior is highly conditional: it matters more in certain (institutional) contexts than others and for certain individuals. More precisely, it has been shown that economic voting is more prevalent in contexts with higher levels of turnout (Bengtsson 2004) and with lower levels of aggregate party identification (Kayser and Wlezien 2010). Also, Gomez and Wilson (2006) found education to be positively related to the likelihood that citizens evaluate their governments on the basis of the economic situation. This indicates that highly sophisticated voters without a strong party identification are more sensitive to incentive-based electoral behavior. More importantly, even, it has become one of the main findings of this literature that economic voting is a forceful explanatory framework only in contexts of clearly attributable government responsibility (Powell and Whitten 1993; Duch and Stevenson 2008; Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci 2012). If (highly sophisticated) voters understand that the responsibility for the course of the economy cannot be attributed clearly to a

government party, economic performance does not predict vote choice. Hence, it seems straightforward to theorize the electoral calculus for highly informed, rational voters in such a context where accountability is severely constrained.
The contributions by Hellwig (Hellwig and Samuels 2007, Hellwig 2008) most explicitly take such context effects into account. Hellwig shows that economic voting is less prevalent in economically interdependent ("globalized") countries, because citizens realize that the globalization-induced government constraints make it much harder to hold governments accountable for economic outcomes. However, even Hellwig theorizes only vote choice, not vote participation. The question why "an economic voter" would participate at all in the election under such circumstances remains unanswered. Participation is a question that the economic voting literature has hardly ever addressed, however. Indeed, most applications of economic voting theories do not address vote abstention at all, a fact that has already drawn a lot of criticism (Tillman 2008, Bengtsson 2004, Bohl and Kriesi 2013). This is where we place our argument: we argue that constrained government affects individuals' expectations about the costs and benefits of voting, and we therefore argue that government constraints are consequential for citizens' willingness to engage in electoral participation, at all.

Indeed, governments in countries hard hit by the recent financial economic crisis are heavily constrained in their economic policy making capacity by the international financial markets, as well as European and international policy measures (Pontusson and Raess 2012). We maintain that constraint government works similar to macroeconomic variables in economic voting models: voters include the perception of their government's political and economic constraints into their consideration whether it is worth to go to the polls. It seems intuitive that once a person reaches the conclusion that the new government has only a small room to manoeuvre disregarded its ideological and coalitional composition (because of external and internal political and economic pressures), the willingness to bear the costs of voting (i.e. the investment in time it takes to acquire enough information for a decision and carry out the actual voting procedure) is likely to decrease. However this anticipation of political inefficacy of the government requires a high level of political sophistication and knowledge. Citizens with low

levels of education still tend to turn to the national governments with their frustrations about the effects of increasingly globalized markets (Häusermann and Kriesi 2012). Therefore, government constraints are expected to weaken the otherwise positive effects of education on participation, thereby lowering participation rates among the highly educated.

In other words, we expect that the politico-economic turmoil of the last years has altered the relationship between education and political participation. Higher education is not as univocally related to a higher propensity to cast a vote as it was before the crisis, since citizens are expected to increasingly include considerations about their governments crisis management capacity into their pocketbook evaluations. Therefore, we hypothesize an interaction effect: government constraints are expected to weaken the positive effect of education on electoral participation. This is what we will test in the remainder of this paper.

4. Data and methods

To test our hypotheses, we use data from the European Social Survey (ESS) round 5, the European Union Statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) [2], as well as several country-level data sources (for an overview, see Table A.1 and A.2 in the appendix). The intersection of these data sources allows to conduct the analyses for 28'841 respondents in the following 22 countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, United Kingdom.

Our main independent variable at the individual level, education, is based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). In ESS 2010, a very detailed version of ISCED with 26 codes is reported. We recoded this variable and constructed an 9-item scale by using only the first digit of the ISCED classifi-

[2] The much higher number of respondents in EU-SILC – compared to ESS - allows for a more reliable calculation of group-specific risk of precarious employment.

cation. The resulting measure of highest level of education ranges from "not completed primary school" to "doctoral degree".[3]

To account for incentive-based electoral behavior in times of economic hardship, we include a variable measuring the individual risk of precarious employment. Similarly to Rehm's (2009) work on unemployment risk, we calculate group-specific frequencies of precarious employment and/or unemployment. To identify the relevant groups, we use the streamlined class scheme by Oesch (2006) that distinguishes between eight different occupational groups, e.g. "small business owners" or "office clerks". We compute group-specific rates of unemployment, involuntary part-time and temporary employment as well as national averages in the EU-SILC household panel 2010. Next, the average rate among the total workforce is subtracted from the group-specific rates in each country in order to obtain group-specific deviations (over- or underrepresentation) of unemployment, involuntary part-time or temporary employment. The mean of these three standardized deviations provides us with a continuous, group-specific measure of the risk of being hit by precarious employment in each country. We then attribute these values to the respondents in our main dataset, the ESS 2010, by using occupational codes.[4]

In order to better isolate the impact of our main independent variables, we control for additional factors at the individual level that are likely to affect participation. Two demographic characteristics (age, gender) as well as income and interest in politics are included in the models (see Solt 2008). In the ESS, income is reported in deciles and the variable measuring political interest is based on a four item scale. These items have been recoded so that higher values indicate more interest in politics.

We also made two specific changes on single variables in the ESS data. In Portugal, the level of income unfortunately was asked in a slightly different way than in the other countries, which results in a 12-item scale instead of the usual 10-item scale (see ESS doc). We therefore had to rescale the variable for Portugal in

[3] The relatively small size of the groups with minimal and maximal education, respectively, does not affect our analysis. The results are robust to a recoded 7-item scale of our measure for education.

[4] For an extensive discussion of a similar operationalization of labor market risk as well as its validity and implications, see Häusermann/Schwander (2013).

order to include it into the models.[5] In addition, we include the quadratic function of age into the analyses to account for live-cycle effects (see Blais et al. 2004).

At the country level, we consider three specific indicators of government constraint. First, we anticipate a soaring public deficit to be a major aspect of a government's room to maneuver, since political and market pressures for austerity measures are likely to increase with the accumulation of public debt. We operationalize public deficit with the 2010 World Bank development indicator data, where it is defined as cash deficit in percentages of GDP.[6] Second, conditionality as a result of bailouts by the *Troika* (i.e. the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)) can be perceived as important confining factor for the governments of affected countries. Since the ESS survey field work was done from mid-2010 to the beginning of 2011 in most countries, we coded all four countries which had to apply for financial assistance programs in 2010 or 2011 – namely Hungary, Greece, Portugal and Ireland – as countries under conditionality. Third, not only political constraints can hamper the scope of governmental action, but also economic constraints. Most notably, we regard financial market pressures stemming from difficulties to issue government bonds in order finance public activities as a challenge for suffering governments, not only because of the actual financial problems but also because of the accompanying media frenzy and public outcry. As indicator, we rely on the long-term interest rates for government bond yields in 2010 as reported by the OECD and Eurostat. Obviously, the three variables are substantially correlated,[7] which is why we decided to run four separate models: one including a factor of the three indicators and one for each indicator independently. The factor scores result from a varimax rotated maximum-likelihood factor analysis on the three single indicators in the crisis years 2009 and 2010.

[5] We also ran tests by including or excluding the income variable as well as the data from Portugal in the regression models presented in the analysis and did not found any deviating results.

[6] More precisely, revenue (including grants) minus expense, minus net acquisition of nonfinancial assets.

[7] Pearson's R of 0.39 (deficit and bond yields), 0.57 (deficit and conditionality) and 0.71 (bond yields and conditionality).

To control for general cross-sectional variances in terms of the severity of the economic crisis, we include the GDP growth per capita[8] in 2010 into the calculations. Finally, it is important to distinguish the more recently democratized countries of Eastern Europe from the Western European countries, since the former show systematically lower turnout levels (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2013). Other potential macro-level covariates such as compulsory voting or party fractionalization so far are so far not considered because of the rather low number of countries and corresponding degrees of freedom available at the macro level.

As for the calculations, we rely on hierarchical regression models including log-likelihood ration tests comparing the models to the fit of the empty model (Table 1) as well as on simulations of the predicted probabilities (Figure 1) and marginal effects (Figure 2). Robustness checks included an outlier analysis (Greece with respect to government bond yields, Ireland with regards deficit), the inclusion of survey and sample weights (using the gllamm library in Stata), the exclusion of the indicator for income in light of the considerable colinearity with education, as well as the consideration of lagged country-level covariates. None of these specifications led to substantial changes in the results.

5. How constrained government affects the relationship between education and participation

The estimated coefficients, standard errors and significance levels of our models are shown in Table 1. To support the interpretation of these results, we plot the simulated predicted probabilities for different levels of education in dependence on the indicators of government constraint in Figure 1 as well as the marginal effects of education in interaction with government constraint in Figure 2.[9]

[8] Sources: World Bank and OECD National Accounts data.

[9] We show the predicted probabilities and marginal effects with the control variables fixed at zero (dichotomous variables) as well as their mean (continuous variables).

Table 1: Hierarchical logit regression models predicting electoral participation

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*	*Model 6*
Fixed effects						
Intercept	-2.395*** (0.212)	-1.478*** (0.313)	-1.444*** (0.299)	-1.477*** (0.297)	-1.803*** (0.369)	-1.451*** (0.307)
Individual level						
Education	0.094*** (0.028)	0.094*** (0.027)	0.083*** (0.011)	0.135*** (0.014)	0.176*** (0.026)	0.093*** (0.012)
Precarious employment	-0.165*** (0.032)	-0.165*** (0.032)	-0.158*** (0.023)	-0.161*** (0.023)	-0.158*** (0.023)	-0.157*** (0.023)
Gender (female)[a]	0.260*** (0.032)	0.260*** (0.032)	0.253*** (0.032)	0.255*** (0.032)	0.253*** (0.032)	0.253*** (0.032)
Age	0.054*** (0.005)	0.054*** (0.005)	0.056*** (0.005)	0.055*** (0.005)	0.056*** (0.005)	0.056*** (0.005)
Age^2	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)
Hardly interested in politics[b]	0.749*** (0.040)	0.749*** (0.040)	0.744*** (0.040)	0.741*** (0.040)	0.744*** (0.040)	0.743*** (0.040)
Quite interested in politics[b]	1.372*** (0.045)	1.371*** (0.045)	1.370*** (0.045)	1.368*** (0.045)	1.368*** (0.045)	1.370*** (0.045)
Very interested in politics[b]	1.665*** (0.076)	1.661*** (0.076)	1.661*** (0.076)	1.664*** (0.076)	1.657*** (0.076)	1.661*** (0.076)
Income	0.077*** (0.007)	0.077*** (0.007)	0.077*** (0.007)	0.077*** (0.007)	0.077*** (0.007)	0.077*** (0.007)
Contextual level						
Government constraint	–	-0.067 (0.105)	0.031 (0.109)	–	–	–
Education*X*Government constraint	–	–	-0.035*** (0.010)	–	–	–
Deficit	–	–	–	0.005 (0.013)	–	–
Education*X*Deficit	–	–	–	-0.008*** (0.001)	–	–
Government bond yield	–	–	–	–	0.091 (0.070)	–
Education*X*Government bond yield	–	–	–	–	-0.021*** (0.005)	–
Conditionality	–	–	–	–	–	0.059 (0.260)
Education*X*Conditionality	–	–	–	–	–	-0.060* (0.023)
GDP growth	–	-0.013 (0.044)	-0.028 (0.044)	-0.028 (0.039)	-0.001 (0.052)	-0.022 (0.044)
Recent democratization (Eastern Europe)[c]	–	-0.663*** (0.194)	-0.672*** (0.196)	-0.678*** (0.185)	-0.723** (0.221)	-0.681*** (0.197)
Random Effects						
Individual level variance (Std. dev.)	0.014 (0.117)	0.014 (0.117)	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Contextual level variance (Std. dev.)	0.259 (0.509)	0.162 (0.403)	0.163 (0.403)	0.145 (0.381)	0.164 (0.405)	0.165 (0.406)
Model Properties						
Number of Cases (Countries)	28'841 (22)	28'841 (22)	28'841 (22)	28'841 (22)	28'841 (22)	28'841 (22)
LR-test[d] (degrees of freedom)	1450.6*** (14)	1406.0*** (14)	1412.7*** (15)	1429.6*** (15)	1414.2*** (15)	1409.1*** (15)

Notes: Unstandardized logit coefficients; standard errors in brackets. One-tailed significance tests, levels: *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$. Reference categories: [a]=Male; [b]=Not at all interested in politics; [c]=Western Europe. [d] Likelihood ratio compared to empty model.

Model 1 shows a baseline specification in order to establish the validity of our micro-level operationalizations. It consists of all individual level predictors, the multilevel specification and a random slope for education. Over all countries, education unsuprisingly picks up a large part of the variation in electoral participation in model 1. The increase of one unit in education changes the odds in favor of participation to 1.10. In general, the predicted probabilities change from 0.78 to 0.87 from the lowest to the highest level of education (see Figure 2).

The effects related to the control variables age, interest in politics and income are highly significant and work in the direction as expected by extant studies on participation (e.g. Solt 2008, Gallego 2010). The two remaining controls, precarious employment risk and gender, are very interestingly associated with participation. The highly significant negative relationship of employment risk with participation is remarkable also in terms of its magnitude. Ceteris paribus, a person confronted with a with an increase of 0.77 in the precarity of her employment situation – one standard deviation in our operationalization, see Table A.1 –, exhibits an odds ratio of about 5:6 (0.85) to cast a vote compared to a person with a less risky occupational environment. Economic risks – at least if measured at the occupational level – are thus very relevant predictors of participation, even though studies on individual level and marco-level economic risks so far have quarried quite ambivalent results (see Bengtson 2004). Likewise, the sigificant and strong increase in the likelihood of voting for women compared to men (odds ratio of 1.30 – everything else equal) is noteworthy in light of the recent literature suggesting a narrowing of the gender divide in terms of participation (see Gallego 2006). The results therefore suggest that the crisis has reversed the traditionally higher willingness of men to vote, but, as for economic risk, a more extensive inspection of this relationship is beyond the scope of this study.

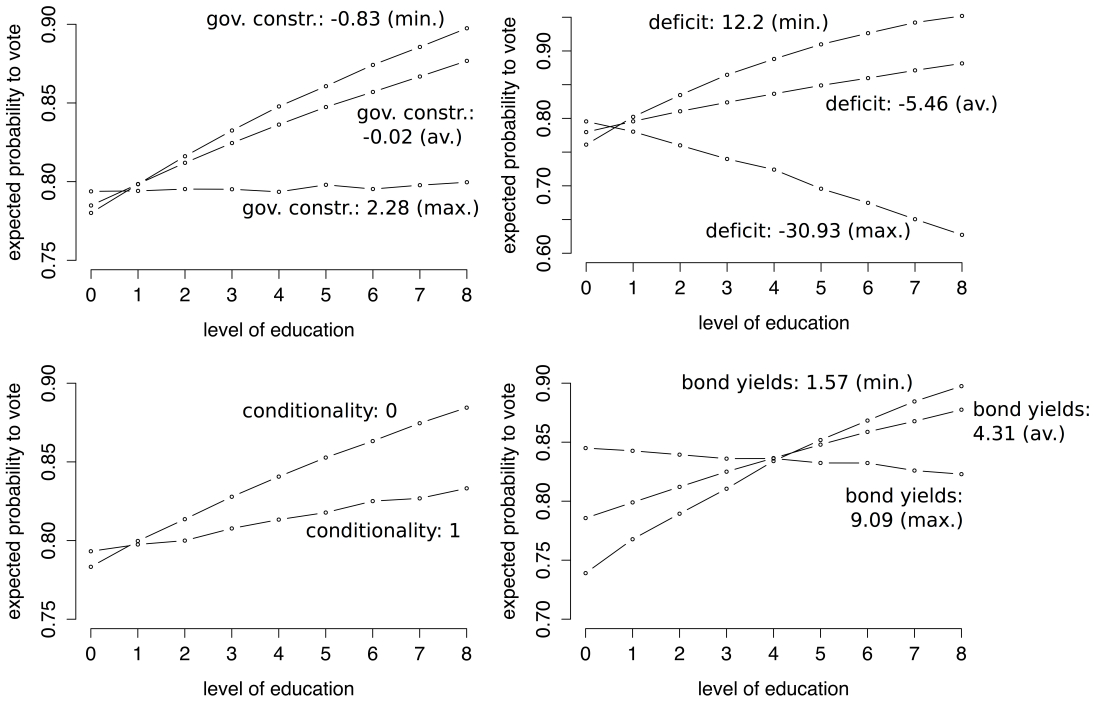

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of electoral participation for different levels of education, depending on government constraint indicators

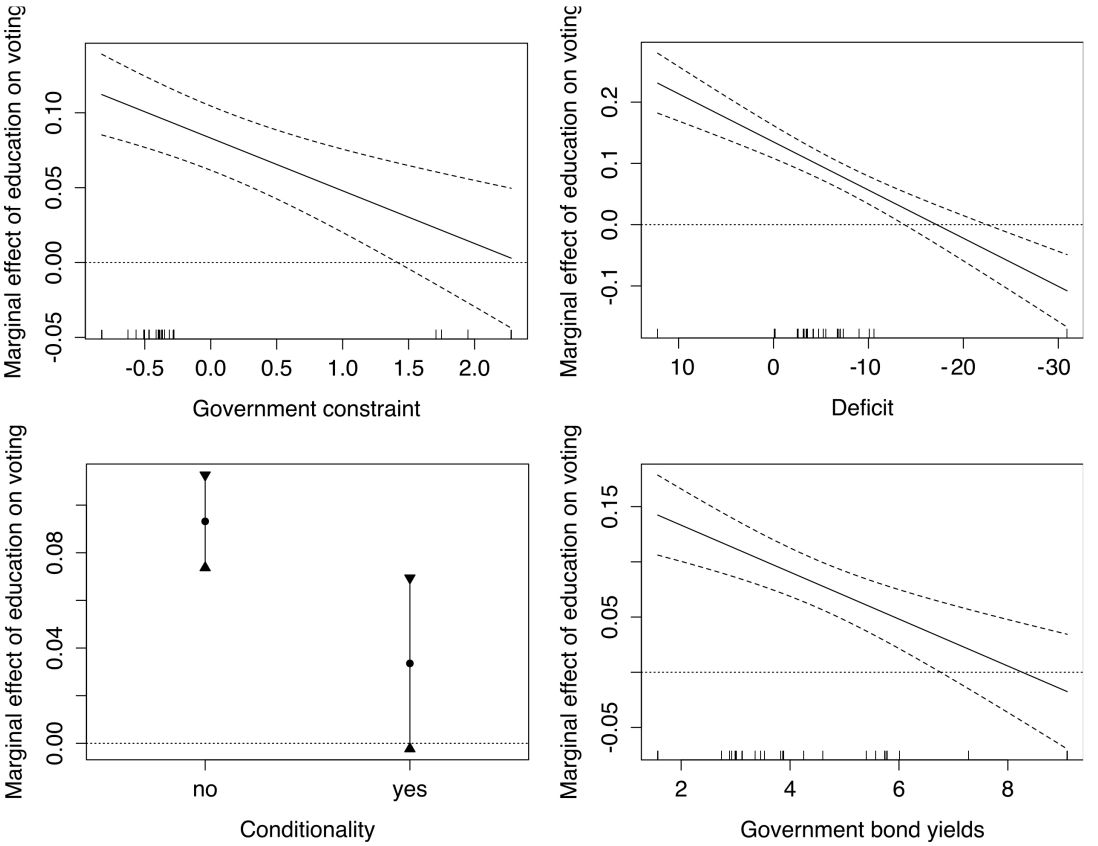

Figure 2: Estimated marginal effects of education if interacted with government constraint indicators

The contribution of these individual level predictors in the models 2 to 6 is highly consistent with the ones in model 1, which points to the robustness of our individual level specification. As for country level covariates, we introduce GDP growth in 2010, the predictor controlling for countries with rather recent democratization (i.e. Eastern European states) and our main explanatory variable – the factor variable measuring different dimensions of government constraint (public deficit, government bond yields, and conditionality) – in model 2. The only country level variable, which – on the aggregate – is substantially related to turnout is the dichotomous distinction between Eastern and Western European countries. Eastern Europeans have a systematically lower propensity to go to the ballots, which in the literature is mainly explained by frustration about corruption and the ramifications of communist legacies (see Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2013). As such, government constraint and GDP growth do not add explanatory power to the prediction. This is consistent with our initially discussed evidence on the seemingly inexistent relationship between the economic crisis and turnout levels.

In model 3 to 6, we test the interaction effects of different operationalizations of government constraint and education in a stepwise fashion. The main finding we want to emphasize here is that *government constraint substantially moderates the effect education has on participation*. The upper right graph in Figure 2 shows that in countries where public deficit, government bond yields and conditionality work in favor of a governments room to maneuver, education is related to an increase in the predicted probability of over 10 percentage points. In countries with an average strength of government constraint, the positive effect of education is slightly moderated. The crucial difference occurs with regard to the countries with a strongly constrained government, namely Greece, Portugal, Hungary and Ireland in our sample. Here, education ceases to have an effect on participation. This is confirmed by the visualization of the marginal effects in Figure 3. At a level of about 1.5 of our factor for constrained government – which separates the heavily constrained countries from the other countries –, the positive relationship of education on participation becomes insignificant. According to our argumentation, this outcome is the effect of pessimistic expectations by the better educated on the leverage their vote has with regards to government effectiveness.

We believe that government constraint during the economic and financial crisis of the last years is a complex occurrence shaped by several aspects of the domestic and international politico-economic context. Nevertheless, the graphs in Figure 2 and 3 show that the single indicators of our government constraint indicator have the same moderating or even reversing effect on the education-participation nexus. At a public deficit of about –12% or below, under conditionality from financial agreements with the EU, ECB or IMF, or at a government bond yield rate of about 6.5% or above, education ceases to be the strong explanatory factor it usually is. Soaring public deficit, such as the -31% of GDP in Ireland, even dramatically reverses the influence of education. Likewise, conditionality in the context of international financial agreements substantially lowers the propensity of individuals with upper secondary level education or higher. And as for government bond yields, they are also reverting the effect of education if they are painfully high as in the case of Greece (9.09%). It has to be emphasized that, although we have only a few countries in the sample with a high government constraint, the effects are not systematically driven by single cases. The exclusion of outliers – Ireland in the model estimating the effect of public deficit as well as Greece in the model including government bond yields – does neither affect the significance nor the direction of the effect of government constraint on the relationship between education and participation.

6. Why should constrained government moderate educational effects?

In the analysis above, we provided evidence for remarkable consequences of constrained governments on the behaviour of highly educated eligible voters at the polls. If this is a more general finding, we should not only observe vote abstention but also a more general discontent with the political situation in the country among the high educated people. Thus, if sophisticated individuals indeed anticipate the inefficacy of governments in national elections, their absence from the ballot should be accompanied by a loss of confidence in the authority and performance of their government and dissatisfaction with the political system at large (Clarke and Acock 1989). In other words, if people do not belief that the political system responds to citizen involvement and is not able to provide relief in dire economic situations, the act of voting becomes meaningless or at least very ineffective. For reasons of cor-

roboration of our findings, we therefore re-examine the proposed mechanism on cross-level interactions with two alternative - but likely related - dependent variables. First, we test whether the reversed effect of higher education in severely constrained countries is also observed with regard to *satisfaction with the government*. Voters who recognize the constrained power of their national government can hardly be pleased with its performance at the same time. Vote abstention could therefore be understood as the expression of frustration. Yet, in this case, abstention is not the only conceivable outcome, since growing dissatisfaction with the government might simply lead to increasing support of opposition or protest parties. In contrast, individuals who realize that their vote might be fully meaningless in circumstances of strong austerity constraints, might as well display discontent with the political system in much more general terms. Vote abstention would therefore come close to a more general alienation from the political system. That is why we additionally examine the response patterns with regard to the broader question of *satisfaction with how democracy works* in the respondent's country.

Both just introduced alternative operationalizations of political engagement range from 1 to 10, where higher values indicate higher levels of satisfaction. Apart from the dependent variables, the model specifications presented in the previous chapter remains unaltered. Table 2 displays the predicted values of satisfaction with government and the way democracy works, respectively, at different levels of education and government constraint.[10]

Table 2: Average predicted values for satisfaction with government and satisfaction with how democracy works at different levels of education and government constraint

		Highest level of education		
		Upper secondary or lower	Post-secondary or higher	Difference
Government constraint	minimum	5.08	5.23	0.15
	average	4.88	4.96	0.08
	maximum	4.28	4.21	-0.07
Government constraint	minimum	6.13	6.47	0.34
	average	5.81	6.04	0.23
	maximum	4.89	4.80	-0.09

[10] Due to the different scale of the dependent variables, a linear multilevel model instead of hierarchical ordered logit models has been calculated.

The overall picture strikingly resembles the results from our previous analysis: While highly educated persons usually assess political circumstances more positively than lower educated individuals, this pattern is reversed for the severely constrained countries. This is not only true for the evaluation of the current government's performance, but also for the satisfaction with the political system in general. Compared to lower educated voters, politically sophisticated individuals indeed seem to place more weight on governmental constraints and factor this knowledge in when it comes to political engagement. Abstention is a very likely to co-exist with such a negative overall assessment. Therefore, this additional evidence gives further credence to the proposed mechanism at work: Highly educated individuals in heavily constrained countries anticipate the inefficacy of their vote and therefore decide to abstain from the ballot.

7. Conclusion

While an increasing literature studies the political aftermath of the great recession, we still know little about whether and why people in the ongoing economic crisis participate at all in the election of a new government. Moreover, while we can derive clear expectations on overall reactions to economic downturns in the participation literature, the empirical evidence is at least inconclusive. Claims that overall participation is systematically increasing or decreasing since the outbreak of the global financial crisis are at odds with the unsteady shifts in overall turnout levels. This is why we distinguished theoretical mechanisms and empirical effects for different social groups, notably with regard to education as one of the main drivers of political activity. While most theories on participatory inequality assume economically and cognitively more privileged citizens to participate strongly in any context, we showed that with increasing political and economic austerity pressures weighting on their government, better educated voters tend to abstain from the polls as much or even more so than less well educated persons. Where public deficit, government bond yields and conditionality work in favor of a government's room to maneuver, higher levels of education are related to a higher propensity to vote – just as the usual expectations in the participation literature would anticipate. Moreover, while the strongest differences in participation patterns occur in the countries with a severely constrained

government, namely Greece, Portugal, Hungary and Ireland, government constraints also lower the willingness of highly educated persons to vote in only moderately affected countries.

It seems intuitive that once a person reaches the conclusion that the new government has only a small room to manoeuver disregarded its ideological and coalitional composition, the willingness to bear the costs of voting is likely to decrease. Yet, this anticipation of political inefficacy of the government requires a high level of political sophistication and knowledge. The full political repercussions caused by soaring public deficits, high government bond yield rates or the conditionality induced by financial agreements can be quite complex and even not easy to de. This is why we only found the moderating effect of government constraint only among the better educated. In other words, we showed that constraint government works similar to macroeconomic variables in economic voting models: highly sophisticated voters include the perception of their government's political and economic constraints into their calculus whether it is worth to go to the polls. Thus, the effect of government constraint, besides other non-electoral consequences, leads to shifts in the composition of the electorate. This, of course, has important normative ramifications on the democratic quality of elections. On the one hand, a moderation of participatory inequalities caused by education should be welcomed, since this improves the representativeness of elections. On the other hand, our models predict that overall participation decreases, which posits a challenge to the legitimacy of electoral contests. Therefore, more equal participation at lower levels in the end does not seem desirable from a theoretical perspective.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Micro level indicators used in the analysis

Variable	Operationalization	Mean	Standard Deviation
Education	First digit of variable *edulvlb* in ESS 5 2010. *"What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?"*	3.52	1.90
Precarious Employment	Based on EU-SILC 2010; continuous variable, difference between group-specific rates of precarious employment / unemployment and the country-specific average rate, value attributed to members of occupational categories in ESS 5 2010	-0.02	0.77
Gender	Based on variable *gndr* in ESS 5 2010. *"Sex of respondent"* Recoded so that (0=male, 1=female)	0.52	0.50
Age	Based on variable *agea* in ESS 5 2010. *"Age of respondent, calculated"*	51.14	16.98
Interest	Based on variable *polintr* in ESS 5 2010. *"How interested would you say you are in politics – are you...?"* Recoded so that (1="not at all interested in politics", 4="very interested in politics")	2.41	0.90
Income	Based on variable *hinctnta* in ESS 5 2010. *"Household's total net income, all sources (in deciles)"*	5.11	2.79

Table A.2: Macro level indicators used in the analysis

Country	GDP growth	Gov. con-straint	Public deficit	Condition-ality	Gov. bond yield
Belgium	1.48	-0.47	-3.2	0	3.46
Bulgaria	1.07	-0.35	-3.47	0	6.01
Cyprus	-2.29	-0.37	-5.23	0	4.6
Czech Republic	2.17	-0.41	-4.74	0	3.88
Germany	4.32	-0.50	-3.15	0	2.74
Denmark	1.13	-0.51	-2.51	0	2.93
Estonia	3.34	-0.63	-0.07	0	1.57
Spain	-0.67	-0.39	-5.23	0	4.25
Finland	2.85	-0.50	-2.6	0	3.01
France	1.21	-0.40	-7.02	0	3.12
Greece	-5.15	1.95	-10.58	1	9.09
Hungary	1.57	1.71	-3.59	1	7.28
Ireland	-1.11	2.28	-30.93	1	5.74
Lithuania	3.12	-0.28	-7.36	0	5.57
Netherlands	1.11	-0.47	-4.19	0	2.99
Norway	-0.77	-0.83	12.2	0	3.53
Poland	3.98	-0.28	-6.73	0	5.78
Portugal	1.89	1.75	-9	1	5.4
Sweden	5.65	-0.56	-0.19	0	2.89
Slovenia	0.82	-0.40	-5.51	0	3.83
Slovak Republic	4.16	-0.37	-6.79	0	3.87
United Kingdom	1.05	-0.31	-10.08	0	3.36